

get admitted to veterans health care facilities? There are 50,000 veterans waiting in line as we speak for an appointment to a veterans health care facility. The President's budget for this year provided \$106 million, not much over last year which itself was inadequate to meet their needs. Over the next 5 years, this budget request is \$18 billion below what is needed for current services. We can do better than that.

We have got promises to keep to our veterans and these promises, above all, should be kept. Given the sporadic, unpredictable violence and the harsh, hard circumstances, it is not surprising that many of our troops come back, some have said as many as 17 percent, from places like Afghanistan and Iraq with difficult mental problems. This, too, is something we could do.

Mr. Speaker, we have to follow up the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) who not only is a member of the Committee on Armed Services but also formerly a military spouse and speaks knowledgeably about this subject.

#### THE HIGH PRICE OF GASOLINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, as the summer driving season is set to begin, gasoline prices are at a record high. While some continue to blame the Bush administration and the Republicans in Congress, the truth is that neither is responsible for the record highs. The reason for the high gas prices includes the cost of crude oil due to a worldwide explosion in demand, the lack of refinery processing capacity, and the overregulation here in Washington.

The House will get the opportunity to address this problem this week with the House bringing to the floor the Energy Policy Act of 2005, H.R. 6. The long-awaited legislation contains a number of provisions that would lower gas prices. H.R. 6 encourages more domestic production of oil with incentives such as a streamlined permit process, promotes a greater refining capacity to bring more oil to market, and increases the gasoline supply by stopping the proliferation of expensive regional boutique fuels.

The Department of Energy predicts by 2025 U.S. oil and natural gas demand will rise by 46 percent, with energy demand increasing 1 percent for every 2 percent in GDP growth. Critics of H.R. 6 claim that it would do little to curb consumption or drive down prices. In fact, this legislation includes provisions to do just that. In order to scale back demand for oil, the proposal encourages vehicles powered by hydrogen fuel cells and increases funding for the Department of Transportation to work to improve fuel efficiency standards. Furthermore, it authorizes \$200 million for the clean cities program which will

provide grants to State and local governments to acquire alternative-fueled vehicles.

Curbing demand is necessary, but it is not nearly enough to lower the price of gas. We also need to increase domestic production of oil. Ending our dependence on foreign oil is not only important to the economy but also doubly important to national security. Currently, the U.S. imports about 60 percent of its oil. The Department of Energy projects this number will increase to 73 percent by 2025. In order to ensure reliable and secure supplies of oil, we have no choice but simply to increase our domestic supply.

Domestic energy production must be increased without compromising a clean environment. There have been giant leaps in technology that would produce oil and natural gas in an environmentally safe manner. We need a comprehensive energy policy that recognizes that sophisticated new technology greatly reduces adverse impacts on the environment by exploration and production. Along with the incredible advances in technology, transportation, and medicine that improve our lives comes the increased need for energy.

In addition, overregulation by the government also contributes to regional and seasonal price fluctuations that increase costs and, of course, reduce flexibility to meet consumer demand. According to the Energy Information Agency, last year refining costs represented about 20 percent of the retail cost of gasoline. By simply scaling back the excessive and cumbersome Federal regulations on refiners, we could significantly reduce these costs. For example, the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments mandate the sale of cleaner burning reformulated gasoline in order to reduce summer smog in nine major metropolitan areas. The law also requires that RFG contain at least 2 percent oxygen by weight.

To comply with these regulations, refiners must switch from winter grade fuel to costlier summer blend gasoline. According to the Federal Trade Commission, this adds 4 cents to 8 cents per gallon to the price of gasoline. Likewise, complying with a national low sulfur gasoline regulation for passenger cars not only represents scientific challenges for refiners but also could adversely affect gasoline supply and, of course, availability. The industry will need to invest more than \$8 billion over the next 3 years to meet this requirement, which will result in higher prices at the pump.

This hodgepodge of customized fuel requirements increases production costs which are ultimately reflected in the price of gasoline that we pay today. These varied gasoline specifications also restrict the ability of refiners and distributors to move supplies around the country in response to local and, of course, regional shortages.

High gas prices affect every sector of the American economy and especially

hit families the hardest. Congress has been debating and debating this issue for too long. We now have the chance to enact this week comprehensive energy legislation that will go a long way to lower the cost of gasoline. We need to fully embrace this opportunity before it is too late.

#### RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to join the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT). I have long admired and respected his efforts since I was elected to Congress and began serving with him on the Committee on Armed Services.

I want to take a moment now to specifically mention our military families. By now, every American should be familiar with the daily contributions and sacrifices made by our service members, but we have to remember that their families serve, too. Many spouses remind me all the time that when the military prepares for deployment, well, so do their families. As a former military spouse myself, I am incredibly grateful and humbled by their unique sacrifices. With so much of our attention on other things, their contributions often go unnoticed and underappreciated. I want our military families to know that we are working to improve the family-support infrastructure that exists for them. Access to family support services should be consistent without regard to where the families reside. Use of technology can certainly enhance their access to family support, but it sure cannot take the place of a support network.

Democrats are seeking more innovative ways to fund child care for military families, to provide a fully resourced, comprehensive and portable health care benefit, and to increase the value of the commissary and exchange benefit.

We have also made progress with addressing the demand for family housing. This has included privatization initiatives, military construction, and adequate funding for the basic allowance for housing. Democrats are also exploring ways in which we can work together with DOD to enhance educational and employment opportunities for military spouses.

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And I can tell the Members firsthand how difficult this is when faced with the challenges of the military lifestyle. By recognizing the contributions of our military families, we have identified a critical part of addressing future recruiting and retention needs of the military. We must continue to recognize their sacrifices as well as those